

**9th South Caucasus Media Conference**  
**From traditional to online media: best practices and perspectives**

**Tbilisi, Georgia**  
**11-12 October 2012**

**DECLARATION**

The 9<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference, organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media with the assistance from OSCE Offices in Yerevan and Baku, was held on 11-12 October in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Throughout the years the South Caucasus Media Conference has become a unique forum to discuss media issues and co-operation among journalists in South Caucasus.

The two-day conference hosted more than 80 journalists, media experts, parliamentarians, civil society representatives and academia from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The focus of the conference was social and online media. Conference participants explored issues related to international standards and national practices regarding freedom of the media in social media and online broadcast regulation. Participants also discussed the latest media developments in South Caucasus states. Furthermore, legal challenges and policies and practices pertaining to online and social media, tendencies in development of digital media, and prospects for online media outlets were discussed during the conference.

*The Conference:*

1. Welcomes the fact that representatives of the media, civil society, as well as academia from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were able to take part in the conference and discuss important issues in the field of online and social media on the regional level, maintaining the spirit of co-operation and trust.
2. Acknowledges that online and traditional media provide opportunities to strengthen implementation of existing commitments of the OSCE participating States in the sphere of media freedom.
3. Welcomes the fact that online media allow for more diversity and pluralism and acknowledges that affordable access to broadband Internet should be fostered.
4. Emphasizes the actual benefits that Internet offers, including advancements in education, economy, individual communications, and acknowledges its importance as a tool to seek, produce, receive, and distribute information.

5. Calls on governments to ensure protection of the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information by adopting laws, policies and practices that foster and not restrict these rights and by ensuring independent judicial oversight and effective public scrutiny of their implementation.
6. Stresses that restrictions to the right to free expression on the Internet are only acceptable if in compliance with international law and standards, necessary in a democratic society, prescribed by law and are in the public interest.
7. Believes that national laws should facilitate openness and transparency of the Internet, including online media.
8. Urges governments to consider access to and use of the Internet and its services, including social media and social networks, a prerequisite for the exercise of a number of basic human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, and promote the universal access to it.
9. Urges to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnership of governments with all relevant parties to close the “digital divide” among different population groups, promote education on use of new media and foster general access to the Internet.
10. Urges telecommunication companies to safeguard network neutrality to ensure that online information and traffic are treated equally regardless of the device, content, author, origin or destination, as well as ensure transparency of the information about their ownership.
11. Acknowledges the active role that users assume in generating content, thus exercising their right to free expression.
12. Urges authorities to promote the use of social media tools to promote transparency and easy access of citizens to government-held information and information of public interest, as well as strengthen accountability of the officials.
13. Calls for co-operation of the governments with civil society and telecommunication companies to ensure that Internet remains an open forum for public debate and that the rights of the users are protected.
14. Emphasizes that in order to fully exercise their rights, Internet users should be protected from unlawful breaches of privacy.
15. Calls on authorities to ensure that journalists, as well as bloggers and ‘citizen reporters’, can work unhindered.
16. Calls on authorities to stop prosecution of bloggers and online media activists.

Tbilisi, 11-12 October 2012

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